**SHAKESPEARE - A RENAISSANCE PERENNIAL**

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This article consists of a consideration of the treatise by Martin Lings entitled 'The Secret of Shakespeare' first published in part in 1965 in 'Tomorrow' and then in its full version as an essay in[1]' 2005.

**LINGS' THESIS**

Lings contends that the Renaissance rejected the medieval notion of the universal shining through man and other forms. He argues that the Renaissance regarded man and other earthly objects "*entirely for their own sakes as if nothing lay behind them".* He projects this thesis on to the works of Shakespeare which he argues demonstrate a "*universality that is a prolongation of the universality of the Middle Ages".*

Lings advances the case, in particular, that architecture of the Middle Ages attains a superiority[2] over that of the Renaissance. He argues also that in painting the medieval period reveals the eternal shining through the temporal. However he contends that Renaissance painting is imprisoned in its own epoch. It does not show us a glimpse of the universal behind the veil of the temporal.

In his article Lings acknowledges that Shakespeare was greatly influenced by what is often referred to as the Perennial Philosophy. The term Perennial in this article refers to this.

Lings declares that it is in the *religio perennis* that Shakespeare's sacred art is rooted. He describes it as an '*all-underlying religion and not in any particular religious form - a deep-seated heredity … like the remembrance of the lost Paradise that can erupt in the soul by a kind of providential atavism*'. Although he gives few illustrations of from Shakespeare's texts he concludes that '*Shakespeare was an outstanding example of this possibility'.*

However he goes further. He sees Shakespeare as evoking the spirit of the Middle Ages observing that "*providentially he was born just in time to be able to endow his plays with the mediaeval grandeur".* For Lings Shakespeare is essentially an extension of the universality of the Middle Ages and his works show him to be "*the last outpost of a quickly vanishing age*".

I seek to explain in this article that it was the glory of the Renaissance to revive and open for the modern world the discovery, translation and dissemination of the Greek, Roman, Hebrew and Egyptian texts, art and philosophic precepts.

In so doing it embraced the fundamental tenets of the Perennial of the transcendent and immanent and that Man though temporal in form, like all creatures, was informed by the Being of the universe expressing itself through humankind and its works and which can be realised in man in selflessness and inner stillness.

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[1] pp177 188 of " Ye Shall Know the Truth: Christianity and the Perennial Philosophy" by Mateus Soares de Azevedo (Editor) © 2005 World Wisdom. Also The Secret of Shakespeare: His Greatest Plays Seen in the Light of Sacred Art Published by Quinta Essentia, 1998

[2] Page i para 1

So far from being creations of the Middle Ages Shakespeare's plays I contend that they are informed by the Perennial that the Renaissance reformulated for the modern age.

*Schools and Teaching*

The article owes much to the message of Frithof Shuon - I prefer to avoid the word "teaching" as it carries with it the implication that what is not relative can be taught. Frithof Shuon disseminated the Perennial, as is well known, but held that the Renaissance humanism created a barrier to its continuance beyond the Middle Ages .

I first comment on how a school of teaching can become itself a block to the realisation of what it seeks to propagate. I cannot say if this is the case with the followers of Frithof Shuon and his teachings but there is this possibility.

For some 20 years I attended evening meetings and (once a year) a residential week run by a school of philosophy. The school was the vehicle of the Perennial as expressed in the Vedanta scriptures and sages of India. I slowly came to recognise that the essence of the Perennial was the perception of the universal appearing in many varied expressions of wisdom and of beauty. It seemed that an institution created, with best intentions, to disseminate such notions was bound to become an identified entity and its teachings more than propositions. Ultimately it seemed to be inescapable that there could be no authority for the teachings other than knowing and that there is no name or place or time or text that is essential to comprehension of the Perennial.

I recall trying to see how it was and why the countryside and the river and lakes I used to visit for fishing were beautiful. I could see intellectually how a universal principle of proportion and harmony would inform architecture and music. But what I could not reach, as it were, was the thing itself. Although the school I attended was most enlightening, the teaching of schools often adheres to an institution or place or a person and tends to foster in the minds of disciples a form of belief. So often it happens that institutions cluster round an inexpressible reality like mussels on a rock eventually obscuring it almost completely – as with Christ's message and Christian doctrine of the Church.

It seems that anything which creates duality of thought, if not resolved in an encompassing principle, is likely to lead to trouble. Belief does not admit a universal world in which there are many streams with one sea. For the believer his is the only way and the only salvation. The heretic, infidel, Jew, Catholic, Protestant, Running Dogs, are existential threats to the belief and thereby to the believer, since belief is a form of identity with the believed. Realisation of the misery and suffering that this inflicts may bring about a perception of a supervening reality. Deep discontent seems to be a necessary state – though not sadly sufficient!

*Mediaeval Cathedral Architecture*

Lings' article starts well with a reminder that the cathedrals of Europe of the $11^{th}$ – $13^{th}$ centuries allow a glimpse of a divine reality. He is sure that these are evidence of what he calls the universality of the Middle Ages. As he puts it "…*earthly things can only be referred*

*back to their spiritual archetypes through…..perception…which pierces through the symbol to the universal reality*..". This is reflects in part a tenet of the Perennial.

I have eliminated from this extract Lings' reference to intellectual perception since, in modern parlance at least, perception of a universal reality is not a faculty of intellect. Such perception is an aspect of being, not of thought; a realisation or recognition - a knowing which is itself a state of singularity or "I". It may of course be that Lings is using the term '*intellect*' to mean spiritual perception or realisation but I take him to mean something else.

There is a famous description of Le Corbusier when he describes the worth of the Parthenon in his "Vers une Architecture Moderne" (1923). He describes it as '*Architecture pure création de l'esprit*': a phenomenon which "*is the sounding board of the Absolute in our being*".

There could not be better intellectual appreciation of this wonderful created form. But it is not a perception as a form of knowing without thought. It is a concept which may lead to perception only when the concept gives place to realisation. For that is the nature of realisation. It is of who we are in essence – our state of consciousness – our very being. Huxley speaks of this in his "Perennial Philosophy" when he describes knowledge as a state of being. It is not thought, with its limitless activity of classification, names, memories, comparisons, mental positions of every conceivable (literally) kind.

It seems to me that Lings falls into the very error of dual thinking that I have mentioned. He sets a mediaeval ideal of the universal Spirit shining from behind a human veil against a humanist obsessed Renaissance. He contends that the spirit seen through the veil is the essence of the mediaeval age. He denies that the Renaissance reveals such perception.

It is true that the Church was 'universal' but only in the sense that the secular world of the Holy Roman Empire and the Roman church governed all Christendom. It also true that the mediaeval period had its exponents of the Perennial. However Lings denies the recognition in the Renaissance of universality of Spirit illuminating form. He speaks of the Renaissance as in opposition to that ideal: that it considered man and other earthly objects for their own sakes and not for what informs them and is revealed by them.

Moreover Lings addresses only one element of the Perennial. – the universal. He does not address the essential characteristic of the Perennial namely the immanent. That is the *'I am that Brahma*' or '*I am that I am'* which I refer to more fully below. Although the human form is temporary it is informed by consciousness which is not other than the universal consciousness of which mankind can be aware here and now as the indwelling "I" or 'kingdom of heaven'.

Some mediaeval mystics touch on this but it surely does not reflect the prevailing spirit of that age. That was more the redemption of mankind from endemic sin through the mediation of Jesus. The notions found in medieval Christianity of original sin, guilt, repentance, the journey to salvation, ascetism, the exacting process of passing through Purgatory to sanctification and the intercession of Jesus are doctrines not to be found in the Perennial. Nor is the indwelling divinity of Man a fundamental tenet of mediaeval theology.

The gothic cathedrals of the Middle Ages employ the pointed ogival arch and the vaulting found in the edifices of Islam which had themselves been devolved from India and Hindu culture. The vaults of Naytn are not later than the tenth century. It also appears that the pointed vaults adjoining the Mlhrab in the Masjid-i Jumeh of Shiraz are of the end of the ninth century[3] well before the emergence of the gothic in the early 12th century.

Use of the pointed arch enabled ecclesiastical sacred buildings to loosen the restrictions imposed by the Romanesque basilica with its semi circular barrel vaults. A structure with ribbing, buttresses and clustered columns allowed for heights of 150ft or more to the roof apex. The procession of stately columns leads the eye and the worshipper to the East – the direction of Jerusalem. The structure enabled the illumination of the vast space with high stained glass fenestration and rose windows of great beauty in the East and West elevations.

The purpose of such architecture was to inspire awe, fear and wonder. In Genesis 28:10–17 a ladder to heaven appears to Jacob in a dream. Upon waking he declares *"How full of awe is this place! this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.*" Such is the traditional intonation prescribed for the Mass for consecration of a church. The mediaeval cathedral was a gate to heaven which is other than an immanent kingdom capable of being known on earth.

The Dedication of the Church of St John Lateran includes this passage[4] "*A ray of the divine presence ought to pierce our souls when we approach the sanctuary and we ought with trembling say to ourselves "How terrible is this place! This is no other than the house of God and the gate of heaven"*

It succinctly epitomises the spirit and ethos of mediaeval cathedral architecture.

**RENAISSANCE PHILOSOPHY**

What then was the spirit of the Renaissance?

Of the philosophers of the Renaissance three stand out as expressing its essence of humanity informed by divinity: they are Marsilio Ficino, Pico de Mirandola, and Giordano Bruno. Bruno's association with Shakespeare's learned and aristocratic contemporaries requires that his precepts be considered both in the context of Shakespeare's works and also of the Perennial which is a subject discussed later in this article.

*Hermeticsm*

Hermeticsm became prevalent in the last 40 years of the 15th century in Florence. It is a compound of ancient spiritual, philosophical, and magical traditions. It takes its name from Hermês Trismegistos (Greek, "Thrice-Greatest Hermeticism "). It has also been called the

[3] CAIS Iranian Architecture Gothic Architecture and Persian Origins. Prof. Arthur Upham Pope - June 1933

[4] Lives of the Fathers Martyrs and the Principal Saints by Rev Alban Butler 1833. Extract for November 1X

Western Esoteric Tradition, and embraces the Perennial or the 'Ageless Wisdom'. Its tenets include the following:-

i. The principle of correspondence: '*as above, so below; as below, so above. As within, so without; as without, so within';*
ii. That mankind's work and purpose is to return to a state of unity with the Divine;
iii. That the Divine is both immanent and transcendent.

In 1460, Cosimo de' Medici, the de facto ruler of Florence, acquired several previously lost Hermetic texts, the *Corpus Hermeticum*, that had been found in the Byzantine Empire comprising a set of about seventeen short Greek texts a series of letters from a master, Hermes Trismegistus, to his disciple. There are also were two singular texts namely the *Asclepius*, preserved in a Latin translation of the third century A.D and a dialogue between Isis and Horus entitled *Kore Kosmou*, or "daughter of the world."

Cosimo de' Medici asked Marsilio Ficino, the principal of the Platonic Florentine Academy, to translate the texts into Latin, even setting aside his translation of the works of Plato which he had also commissioned. The Hermetica made an immediate impact on the Renaissance.

Pico della Mirandola opened his *Oration* with a quotation from the *Asclepius*. It gave rise to the notion that the individual was significant and to be valued not because of pennance, redemption, ascetism or sacrifice or having endured Purgatory but because of his essential divinity. Hermeticsm was a spiritual ethos that permeated the fabric of the Florentine Renaissance. It represents the emergence of the Perennial in a form that was the catalyst for its appearance and development in Urbino, Milan, Rome, Mantua and Venice.

Each of Ficino and Pico de Mirandola were immersed in the notions of Hermeticsm which flourished in the intellectual nursery of 15$^{th}$ century Florence. They represent in their teachings and works the spirit of the Florentine Renaissance.

*Marsilio Ficino*

Marsilio Ficino was prominent among Renaissance philosophers. He was both a Catholic priest and humanist. He was the principal of the Florentine Academy and translated the entire works of Plato.

Cosimo de Medici established the Florentine Academy on the model of Plato's Academy. As already mentioned he had been able to find Greek manuscripts of Plato's dialogues and work on translating these into Latin was undertaken by Ficino from 1462 – 1469. Ficino also translated the Hermetica from Hellenistic Greek documents found by Leonardo da Pistoia as well as the works of Neoplatonists.

He held that the soul or love and beauty were unifying principles in creation and that Christian theology was one with Platonic thought. Ficino looked on Plato as the summit of pre-Christian philosophy and that what he termed the *Prisca Theologica* enshrined truth throughout all ages.

The essence of Ficino's teaching – and with it the spirit of the Renaissance - marks a reversal of mediaeval doctrine. That doctrine did not embrace the essential divinity of Man. Ficino however addresses humanity in a letter of 1484 "*Know thyself, divine race clothed with a mortal garment".* The notion of obscuring garments and masks appears frequently in Shakespeare[5]. Save for a few mystical texts the Middle Ages religious doctrine asserted the inherence of sin and the need for redemption through Christ.

The revolution in thought that Ficino provoked with his synthesis of the teachings of Plato and Plotinus - that Man in his own self is of the divine - is well described in the following passage[6]:-

> *"This concept completely broke through the boundary within which religion had been enclosed by Catholicsm, pointing towards a free religion, which is the same thing as liberty of thought. In this way the Italian Renaissance inspired a process of religious revival, less widespread but more profound than the Reformation"*

For Ficino and Leonardo da Vinci, who also imbibed his philosophy and was for a while in the household of Lorenzo the Magnificent, the divine was revealed in philosophy, religion, science, painting and all other arts as wells as in geometry and mathematics. Ficino held that the unifying principle of all these were the harmonies of beauty of the soul as one with the Godhead directly rehearsing the dialogue between Socrates and Diotima in the Symposium.

Ficino maintained, as is discussed below in the context of Renaissance painting and notions of Beauty, that the salient characteristic of the temporal world is that it is beautiful – that Beauty and its concomitant Love is an expression of a divine reality. He taught– in common with Plato and Plotinus – that virtue and beauty are essentially the same. As he himself expressed it – and as was later divined by Mozart - "*Artists in each of the arts seek after and care for nothing but love"*.

*Pico de Mirandola*

The works of Pico de Mirandola are thought of as the apologia of Renaissance humanism– in particular his *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486). He was an exponent of the Perennial which itself was believed to derive its origin from a "*Prisca Theologia*" (ancient theology) of great antiquity. He wrote of the essential unity of mediaeval mystical teachings with Aristotle and Plato and the Kabbalah and Quran. He was the apostle of 'syncretism' asserting an underlying unity and urging an inclusive approach to other faiths. He also imbibed at the well of Hermeticsm.

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[5] See e.g. Twelfth Night "*A spirit I am indeed; but am in that dimension grossly clad which from the womb I did participate"* V.i and As You Like It (Rosalind disguised as Ganymede).

[66] The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino Giuseppe Sattia 1925 p.87

The salient and opening pages of the *Oration* have been described[7] as the humanist charter of human freedom and dignity. Pico asserts that we *can* be what we *want* to be. For this we must be selfless in the strictest sense. We must shed the identity and personality that distinguish and separate us from all other individuals and from God. Mystical union with God is Pico's final goal, and extinguishing the self is a necessary consequence of achieving it.

> *Then let us flood the soul, purified and well tempered, with the light of natural philosophy so that finally we may perfect it with knowledge of divinity*…..[so that] *we shall be ourselves no longer, but shall be Him, the very one who made us.*[8]

The Oration expresses ideals that have come to be indelibly associated with the Florentine Renaissance. Cronin[9] summarises these as freedom, versatility, the active life, and love of God through the world's beauty – having, as depicted in Pico's Heptaplus (1489), its ultimate fulfilment of unity in consciousness.

*The individual and the universal*

It is a curious but common feature of language that it can come to mean the opposite of what it originally conveyed. The word 'individual' today carries the meaning of what is entirely separate and significant "*for [its] own sake[s]*" to quote Lings.

The glory of individual Man which the work of the Renaissance artists and writers is said to enshrine is derived directly from '*individuus"*. That word is a Latin noun, neuter, singular. It means undivided, indivisible, inseparable. For the Renaissance and for the mediaeval mystics (e.g.Eckhart) that was indeed the state of the particular when known as the universal.

Agostino Steuco, a Renaissance biblical scholar, in his *De perenni philosophia* (1540), sought to demonstrate that the tenets of sages, poets, and philosophers from classical antiquity were in essential harmony with Christianity. His *De perenni philosophia* can be seen as a prospectus for reconciling the schisms in the Christian world by re-casting humanist and Platonic ideals.

Whilst such notions had been advanced by Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola in the previous century Steuco's work was the first publication which was devoted to the subject.

Steuco refers to the '"*one principle of all things, of which there has always been one and the same knowledge among all peoples*" which the *prisci theologica* preserves even when, as he thinks is likely, it is forgotten by mankind. He foreshadows Giordano Bruno in his precepts that philosophy leads to knowledge of God, and that truth flows from a single source the *prisca theologica,* more ancient even than the pre-Socratics. What is particularly of the

[7] Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy 2008 rev 2016
[8] Pico de Mirandola - Oration
[9] Florentine Renaissance Cronin Ch 6 p137

Renaissance is his affirmation that such knowledge is innate in the individual reflecting the same dictum of Lamblichus of the 3rd /4th centuries AD whose teachings he had adopted.

Accordingly the premise of Lings' argument as to the philosophy and spirit of the Renaissance fails. The universal was very much in the mind and works of the Renaissance. However it was not in the aspirational form of the Middle Ages but that of the Perennial and its perception that the dignity of man rests in his essential divine and universal nature.

As I hope to demonstrate in the latter part of this article Shakespeare was not "*the last outpost of a quickly vanishing age".* He bathed in the waters of the Renaissance ideals that had begun to flow in London. But before turning to a consideration of Shakespeare the comments of Ling on Renaissance architecture and on Renaissance painting require close review.

**THE RENAISSANCE AND ITS ARCHITECTURE**

I refer to Renaissance painting more fully below. Lings makes a good superficial case with Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel image of God. He takes this depiction as demonstrating that Renaissance art considers man and other earthly objects entirely for their own sakes. But he does not refer to Michelangelo's wonderful Pieta. That sculpture is a miracle of compassion and forgiveness – frailty of life held in everlasting love. Similarly Donatello's statue of St John the Baptist in the Bargello of Florence is a counterpart to his David.

The common misperception – propagated by Pugin and Ruskin and rehearsed by Lings – that the Gothic cathedrals are the ultimate opening to the divine whilst the art of the Renaissance "*lacks an opening on to the universal and is altogether imprisoned in its own epoch*" fails to withstand examination.

Whilst it is true that the impulse to reconcile the immanent with the transcendent loses its momentum with the secularising of religion and the arts of the Roman Renaissance by the mid 16th century under the Papist Renaissance Popes Leo X and Clement VII, the 15th century Florentine Renaissance embraced not only a reconciliation with classical philosophy with Christian virtues but also the much more immediate and realisable notion of union of Man with God as the temporal informed by the eternal.

In describing above the essence of the gothic cathedrals and the dominant experience they engender in the onlooker, it is evident that this is one of aspiration to a higher light and another plane. There is little sense of 'so above so below'.

The Renaissance restated the wisdom of the Veda and the Platonic dialogues as expressed by its most remarkable philosopher *"I understand Being in all and over all, as there is nothing without participation in Being, and there is no being without Essence. Thus nothing can be free of the Divine Presence"*[10]. The principles that govern Renaissance architecture are imbued with this new but ancient spirit.

[10] *De la Causa, Principio e Uno* (1584) Giordano Bruno

*Brunelleschi*

The first of the great exponents of ecclesiastical architecture of the Florentine Renaissance was Filippo Brunelleschi. He designed or was responsible for the Duomo of the Cathedral, San Lorenzo, Santo Spirito and the sublime Pazzi Chapel.

These wonderful works were in the shape of the cross (other than the Pazzi Chapel) and with altars commanding a linear approach along the nave. However the essence of the Renaissance architecture embracing the union of temporal and transcendent is particularly revealed in his design of Santa Maria degli Angeli (1434–1437). This he composed as a rotunda in an octagonal shape having eight equal sides, each with a chapel. The altar was sited in the very centre.

Santa Maria degli Angeli's design was revolutionary. By creating a space which had no linear or spatial differences within, it conveyed the essential condition of the human and the divine as an ever present unity here and now: not as an aspiration to another plane and the hereafter in time. This also accounts for the strictures of Brunelleschi that the walls of his churches be kept white for a greater experience of purity and presence without distractions for the mind and emotions.

The design owes much to Brunelleschi's journey to Rome and study of Roman buildings and in particular his meticulous scrutiny of the construction of the Pantheon – a miraculous building of consummate beauty and engineering skill not to be equalled until the early 20$^{th}$ century.

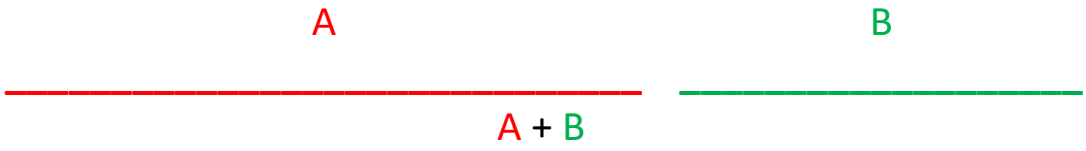
Santa Maria was unfinished. The completed part was incorporated into a church of another design. However there is a picture of it in the *Codex Rustichi* from 1450. The central plan was adopted and reached its zenith in Saint Peter's in Rome at the hand of Michelangelo and Carlo Maderna.

*Alberti*

The other great master of Florentine Renaissance architecture was Alberti. He derived much of his *De re Aedificatoria* from the extraordinary work of the Roman master Vitruvius. Although Alberti is known for his work on St Maria Novella he follows Brunelleschi with his advocacy of the circle as to ideal form for sacred buildings appearing as it does in many forms in Nature.

He cites various form of central church floor plans including the square, the hexagon, octagon, decagon and dodecagon, all derived from the circle, and, derived from the square, rectangles that exhibit the square and a half, square and a third and double square, all of which have enharmonic parallels in music. He uses side chapels as additional figures multiplying these forms. But each such geometric shape is governed by defined ratios which ensure that all elements of both the plans and the elevations, however varied, are perceived as a unity with all in harmony with each.

There is only one example of a church designed by Alberti with a central floor plan and that no longer has the form of his original design. The church is San Sebastiano in Mantua**.** Albert adopts what is known as the golden ratio. This becomes of great significance by reason of it being regarded as the divine proportion. The ratio can be described by reference to the following diagram where **A** + **B** is to A as A is to **B.**




The ratio is 1:1.618. The golden rectangle may be cut in half to form two smaller rectangles with the same ratio. It was known to be found in many forms of nature, either exactly or closely approximate, including the progression of spirals in shells and twigs on boughs. In 2010, the journal *Science* reported that the golden ratio is present at the atomic scale in the magnetic resonance of spins in cobalt niobate crystals. It is a most pleasing constant and is the ration adopted for A1 – A5 print paper.

*Pacioli*

It was Luca Pacioli, in his widely disseminated work *Compendio divina proportione* (*Compendium on the Divine Proportion*), a three-volume treatise published in 1509, who described the golden ratio *sectio aurea* (following Euclid) and explored its applications to various arts. As noted below Pacioli deals extensively with the use of perspective particularly as taught to him by Piero della Francesca.

Leonardo da Vinci illustrated the *Compendia* of Pacioli and gave the ratio the name 'golden section'. He lived with Pacioli during the time he was making the illustrations. He also took mathematics lessons from him.

Pacioli cites 5 reasons for describing the golden ratio (a term given to it by his colleague Leonardo da Vinci) as the "Divine Proportion" namely that:-

1. Its value represents divine simplicity.
2. Its definition invokes three lengths, symbolizing the Holy Trinity.
3. Its irrationality represents God's incomprehensibility.
4. Its self-similarity recalls God's omnipresence and invariability.
5. Its relation to the dodecahedron, which represents the quintessence.

A recent critique on Pacioli includes the following passage[11]

> "In *Divina Proportione*, building craft transmutes material solids, spiritualizing them with the presence of God's luminous, continuous proportion, a mathematical ordering of Platonic solids in the world".
>
> "To him [Pacioli], the human body's proportions are created by what he called "the finger of God" and this is the true source of divine proportion. The divine proportion is what mathematically links the circumference of the circle to its diameter or radius, and this is the proportion governing the spherical human head in proportional relationship to all other parts of the body"
>
> "The [ ] quintessence is always something superior, deriving from God and Heaven. But the purest quintessence dwells in the mortal substance and applies to the lower world. Underlying the transmutation of the matter there is incorruptible and unchangeable essence.
>
> So in the practical life of the mundane world, mathematical doctrines operate and functions mutely. It is where the esoteric and mysterious principles find their discernible forms."

The golden rectangle or section indicated the presence of God within the created. Known and applied before Pacioli published his *Compendia,* as witness Brunelleschi's Pazzi Chapel, it was the Renaissance that applied it once more to architecture.

*Giorgio : Palladio*

The Renaissance ideal of the union of the cosmological and the aesthetic is expressed in the architectural precepts of the age. Man is made in the image of God – thus the proportions of his body are revelations of divine will. By parity of reasoning since the mathematical ratios govern proportions both are of a divine order which governs and is expressed in architecture. Mathematical ratios inform the macrocosm and the microcosm.

Francesco Giorgio (or Zorzi) was an adherent of the Christian Kabbala, an interpretation of the Kabbala through the prism of Christianity. He was one of its most prominent exponents after Pico de Mirandola. Giorgio had a profound knowledge of Pythagoras' teaching and that of the later Plato's Timaeus on mathematics and the divine harmony. He was the author of a memorandum as to the proportions that should govern San Francesca della Vigna in Venice the original plan of which had been designed by Sansovino. Giorgio was himself a Franciscan friar attached to that church.

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[11] October 25 2018 Architectural Intentions from Vitruvius to the Renaissance. Week 8: Alberti, Pacioli, Lineamenti and Divine Proportion

San Francesco is the first Renaissance Venetian interior. Giorgio applied to San Francesco the principles of proportion that he had set out in his *De Harmonia* and gave strict instructions as to the design of its façade of San Francesca. When Palladio completed the façade later in that century he would certainly have been familiar not only with the memorandum but also with Giorgio's *De Harmonia*.

The precept of unity with the divine which informs the octagonal church design and principles of proportion was part of the catechism of Palladio. That master of the Venetian Renaissance held that the best type of church should be round. Palladio directs [12] that:

> *"Circular buildings [are] a form in which is to be found neither beginning nor end and the one distinguishable from the other; its parts correspond to each other and all participate in the shape of the whole. Moreover every part being equidistant from the centre, such a building demonstrates extremely well the unity, the infinite essence and the justice of God"*

Can there be a more telling indication of the Renaissance ideal that sacred architecture should reflect the principle of the Perennial that of both the transcendence and also the immanence of God. Can it be doubted that whilst both the Gothic and the Renaissance forms rest on the transcendence of the unmanifest universal it was the Renaissance that avowed the simple precept "as above so below".

**THE PAINTINGS OF THE FLORENTINE RENAISSANCE**.

*Divinity and Representation*

Lings asserts that "*there is more divinity underlying Simone Martini's painting of St Francis than there is in Michelangelo's representation of the Creator Himself*.[13] Yet the creator of the frecos in the Sistine Chapel was known as Divino Michelangelo.

The Renaissance, whilst embracing the notion of the universal and divine, took it out of the exclusive dominion of the Church. It proclaimed the immanence of the divine in Man. Plato's ideal is well expressed by Michelangelo himself "*Every beauty that is seen on earth recalls to feeling people more than other things that fount of pity whence we all come; nor do we have any other sample of the fruit of heaven under this earth*". He was an adherent of Ficino and who lived for four years in the household of Lorenzo the Magnificent

Lings' statement is seen to be untenable once it is realised that the singular ALL – that is the Divine - cannot be made an object. It is the subject. It cannot be depicted or described. It can only be realised in Being. Divinity in any created form can only be implicit.

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[12] Rudolf Wittkower Principles of Palladio's Architecture II *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* Vol. 8 (1945), pp. 68-82)

[13] Page 2 last complete para.

There cannot be "more divinity". Absolute cannot be relative. Works of art can only be conceptual in form. The same may be said of the mind of Nature. What gives rise to an apprehension of divinity is that which informs all things. This can only be known in Being, pure consciousness. This consciousness is attended by love, bliss, completeness, absence of self.

A work of art is enduring only if it brings about in us a kind of recognition of what it implies. This is the message of Diotima's explanation of beauty to Socrates in the Symposium when she asserts that the *"soul of beauty is and everlasting loveliness….the same then as now, here as there, this way and that way, the same to every worshipper as it is to every other…..subsisting of itself and by itself in an eternal oneness. And this is the only way to be led towards the sanctuary of Love. And if my dear Socrates Man's life is ever worth the living it is when he has attained to the very soul of beauty …when he shall be called the friend of God*"

That is why certain works of art draw us to them repeatedly for in witnessing them we are witnessing ourselves. Love is an aspect of this unity – the release of all that is personal, a complete sense of union with what is – a dissolution of self. As was said by Mozart "*Neither a lofty degree of intelligence nor imagination nor both together go to the making of genius. Love, love, love, that is the soul of genius*."

Love and Beauty are discussed in Plato and Plotinus[14]. Plato's *Phaedrus* Socrates describes Love as informing Beauty restoring the human soul to the celestial reality to which it ascends by stages of apprehension of Beauty. The notion of Beauty as an awakening power is expressed further in Plotinus (204/5 – 270 AD), an exponent of Plato's philosophy. As he declares in his *Ennead 9* (I iv), the soul is of the divine has an intrinsic beauty. Thus self discovery – that is divine selfhood – and revelation of beauty are simultaneous and mutually implied. As has been said [15]Plato and Plotinus presented the 15th century with an electrifying assertion: the soul of Man is divine by nature and reaches unity with the divine in love.

Plotinus exhorts us that the soul must ascend beyond all that is separate from God as the cause of Being, Life and Intelligence revealed as love and beauty, so that the ascent by stages of Love and concomitant revelations of Beauty attains absolute resolution in union with God.

Such then is the true nature of love – the absence of self, the dissolution of all that is personal, the union of the transient with the constant. It is the Sun which bursts upon those who leave the shadows and images of the walls of the cave and all the names and sounds attached to them in the minds of its denizens.[16] It is universal and indescribable.

Thus whilst we may write about the universal and the immanent they cannot by that means be known. They lie beyond '*discourse of reason*[17]'

[14] Shakespeare and Platonic Beauty John Vyvyan Chatto & Windus pp 23,24
[15] Op Cit p31.
[16] Plato Republic 514a–520a
[17] Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (1528)

*Botticelli*

The paintings of the Florentine Renaissance exhibit unmistakable examples of the eternal shining through form. The works of Piero della Francesca and of Bottilcelli two of its illustrious figures illuminate this. They are sublime and self effacing. .

Piero is considered below in the context of the Renaissance re-discovery of mathematical principles and proportion. The "*opening of the particular on to the universal*"[18] is here examined in the work of Filippo Botticelli perhaps the most popular of its celebrated masters.

As E.M Gombrich, a distinguished historian of Renaissance, has recorded[19], to Botticelli the attributes and appearances of the gods revealed their real essence. It was as important to establish the authentic image of a god or a planet as to find its true name. In both, for those who could read the esoteric language of ancient wisdom, was hidden the secret of their being

Gombrich argues that Botticelli painted his sublime Primavera for Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco Medici. Certainly an inventory of his possessions at the time includes this extraordinary painting. On his father's death Lorenzo was taken into the care of his cousin Lorenzo the Magnificent the grandson of Cosimo. HIs tutor was Marsilio Ficino. As noted above the discovery and translation of the *Corpus Heremeticum* had deep consequence for the Medici as a family and for the artists and philosophers for whom they were patrons or whose works they admired. These included Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo.

Gombrich reminds us that, for Ficino, Beauty was a symbol of the Divine[20]. In a letter to his pupil Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco Medici, which is reproduced in Gombrich, Ficino describes the birth of Venus as the birth of Beauty. His account is of the divine spirit informing the soul – and matter. This, Ficino explains, is a form of fertilisation that from the soul comes forth Beauty and it is this conversion, this birth of Beauty from the Soul, that is called Venus[21].

Gombrich makes the case that Venus stands for the virtue of Humanitas[22]. The central figure of Primavera is *Venus Humanitas* (Venus Humanity, love towards humankind and also to be human). In interpreting a letter from Marsilio Ficino to Pierfrancesco of Medici; Gombrich explains that he needs to be instructed in Human Virtue and for that purpose the picture was created. He cites Pico de Mirandola's comment as to" *the division of the unity of Venus in the trinity of the graces*"[23].

Marsilio Ficino writes his letter (amongst many) to his young pupil Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco Medici in 1477. The letter was written at the time that Botticelli executed the Primavera and it is now widely accepted that Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco Medici had commissioned it. In that letter he declares the immanence of the divine in Humanity its state of beauty:-

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[18] Lings page 2 complete para 2 line 3

[19] E M Gombrich Botticelli's Mythologies: A Study in the Neoplatonic Symbolism of His Circle. Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes Vol. 8 (1945), pp. 7-60 (62 pages) The Warburg Institute.

[20] E. H Gombrich p.58

[21] E.H Gombrich p.54 Marsilio Ficino Commentary on Plato's Philebus p1217

[22] E. H Gombrich p.32

[23] E. H Gombrich p.33

> *"the one who created you is greater than heavens, and you will also be greater than heavens as soon as you decide to look at them face to face. We don't have to look for those things out of us, as all the heavens are in our interior and the forceful energy we carry inside us proves our celestial origin. (…) Last, you must put your eyes upon Venus herself, that is, upon Humanity. (…) Be then careful, as you shall not disregard her, thinking maybe that humanitas is of earthly origin. (…) As Humanity (humanitas) herself is a nymph of excellent graciousness, born from the heavens and loved more than the others by God almighty. Her soul and her mind are Love and Charity, her eyes Dignity Magnanimity, her hands Liberality and Magnificence, her foot Charm and Modesty. The group is, then, Temperance and Rectitude, Charm and Splendour. Oh, what a refined beauty! How lovely to see her![24]"*

Ficino refers[25] also to there being two Venuses: the heavenly Venus, by its own intelligence, reproduces in itself the most exact beauty of the divine: the natural Venus by the fertility of the divine seeds, prepares in earthly matter the beauty divinely conceived in itself and makes heavenly beauty accessible to man.

The three graces of Primavera – Pico de Mirandola describes them as Beauty Love and Joy - reminiscent of SatChitAnanda of the Vedanta[26] - symbolise the Trinitarian universal principle. Mercury is shown on the left of the painting as the divine messenger revealing and interpreting hermetic truth. He is touches the clouds to reveal celestial mysteries symbolised by golden apples. To the right is what is believed to be Zephyr the wind of Spring at whose touch the nymph is transformed into Flora from whose mouth flowers emerge.

Ficino himself commissioned a medal from Niccolo Fiorentino dedicated to a disciple of Ficino depicting the 3 Graces with the inscription Beauty – Love – Joy. For Ficino Beauty is divinely inherent in the created world; Love its necessary concomitant and Joy its experience.

As has been well said "*While Spring stirs the world to beauty Venus uses love to turn the heart to truths divine…. [Botticelli] opens to secular art man's deepest emotions and highest aspirations, and this amounts to a change not of degree but of kind. He proves the power of style to confer a more than human value on earthly objects and thereby not only the nymph of spring, but man himself undergoes a metamorphosis*"[27]

The concept of Venus as love and also as new birth reaches its wonderful consummation in Botticelli's the *Birth of Venus* completed about ten years later. A symbol of Venus for the Florentines was the scallop shell. This was to be found on gravestones of the Roman classical period and in later ages on Christian gravestone with the symbol of the rising goddess

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[24] E. H Gombrich Op Cit pp16.17
[25] Ficino Commentary re *Plotinus Enneads*
[26] Translation 'Absolute Being, Consciousness, Bliss'
[27] V. Cronin The Florentine Renaissance p 236

representing the arising soul – a communion of the two worlds of earth and spirit. The whole is clearly reminiscent of a Baptism of Christ as depicted in particular by Piero della Francesca.

What is surely unarguable, as these works illustrate, is that the divine and universal principle – the transcendent – and its reflection in the individual soul – the immanent – was of the very essence of painting in the Renaissance.

**MATHEMATICS AND THE RENAISSANCE**

To the Florentine humanist of the 15th century geometry, mathematics and their union in proportion was as fundamental as philosophy – probably more so. Geometry and mathematics were regarded more as a fusion than separate bodies of principles.

*Pythagorean precepts*

Pythagoras (circa 530 BC) is credited with the discovery of musical intervals. For example a tuned string will sound the octave when its length is halved and so with further reductions will other intervals be found. The intervals correspond to the ratios in the harmonic progression. The notion of harmony – balance and unity in variety - originated with Pythagoras. It gave rise to the precept that the key to the cosmos was to be found in numbers – the theory of ideas or of universals. Mathematics was in the mind's eye. A proposition once established was true everywhere and always. What is called[28] the distinction between the intelligible and the sensible arises – intelligible is what is comprehended by the intellect as that which is real perfect and eternal. Sensible is the apparent, the illusory and the transient.

When the Renaissance uncovered the works of Pythagoras and Plato the fundamental notions of numerical structure and harmony assumed a dominant role in its thought and works. It is what prompted the revival of scientific enquiry. As has been demonstrated above it also profoundly affected Renaissance architecture and painting and accounts for the influence of Pacioli and for Alberti's embracing of geometric forms and numerical ratios. It informs the Venetian Renaissance through the thought of Francesco Giorgio and the works of Palladio.

Giacomo Andrea de Ferrara, Francesco Giorgio and Leonardo drew directly on Vitruvius when setting out to show that the matrix of the human body was founded on the principle of proportions. Mathematics, geometry and their expression in a harmony also came to inform works of art. This was not confined to music as expounded by Pythagoras and architecture as applied by Alberti and Palladio but extended also to painting.

For the Renaissance, as for Pythagoras and his school, mathematics, geometry, proportion and harmony were keys to the comprehension of the cosmos. Such is reflected in the speech

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[28] Lamblichus (2

45 – 325 AD) a Syrian NeoPlatonist and biographer of Pythagoras speaks of the transcendent One, the *monad*, whose first principle is intellect, *nous* with a further unifying principle out of which arises the intellect or soul the psyche emerge the intelligible (objects of thought) and intellective (thought), the latter sphere being the domain of thought, the former of the objects of thought. These three entities, the soul the intelligible and the intellective, form a *triad.*

of Ulysees in *Troilus and Cressida* (I. iii. 85-88). There was no schism between science and art for the Renaissance humanist. Truth was revealed through numbers and geometry.

It is instructive to see how Pythagorean and Platonic principles were applied to painting by two of its celebrated artists.

*Piero della Francesca*

Piero della Francesca was known and celebrated in the mid 15th century as a consummate mathematician and a scholar of Euclid geometrical forms and theories. He wrote treatises on perspective (*De Prospettiva Pingendi*) and on the 5 regular bodies (*De Quinque Corporibus Regularibus*) and It is almost certain that he regarded these bodies as having cosmological significance as described in Plato's Timaeus. HIs pupil Pacioli retailed these principles which came to be very influential in the 16th century.

Visitors to the National Gallery will know of the beautiful work by Piero *The Baptism of Christ*. There are other powerful examples in his works of the mathematical ideals referred to above and some have more obvious revelations of his extraordinary grasp of perspective. But the *Baptism* is both revered and accessible. The following is taken from the short but illuminating book by Pope-Hennessy[29].

*The proportions of the composition were dictated by the width of the panel two braccia exactly. The composition below the springing of the arch was planned as a rectangle with a semi-circle superimposed. The height of Christ is one and a half braccia. The spaces at the sides are one third of the height of Christ – half a braccia each. In the rectangle use was made of fifteen sided equilateral – equiangular. The dominance of the figure of Christ results as it does in his fresco of the Resurrection from the vision of Christ seen as Sol Invictus in mathematical terms.*

There could not be a more beautiful and convincing example of the Renaissance ideal of the universal and eternal shining through individual and passing.

*Leonardo da Vinci*

Leonardo was convinced of matrix of harmonic ratios that underlay visual art and of the consonance revealed in music. He held that music was the sister of painting in that musical intervals had harmonic ratios and painting had its proportions. Linear perspective was governed by the same ratios since objects of equal size receding at regular intervals diminish in harmonic progression.

A striking illustration of this conviction is his *Adoration of the Magi* (1481). Ficino and his Academy interpreted this event as symbolising the convergence of Judaic revelation with the wisdom of the Chaldeans (9th – 6th centuries BC) which it was believed reflected Christianity[30].

[29] Sir James Pope-Hennessy *The Piero della Francesca Trail* 1991. He was director of the British Museum, the V&A and Professor of Fine Arts New York University

[30] The Florentine Renaissance Vincent Cronin 1967 Collins 1992 Pimlico pp220,221

The commonality of mystic teachings occupied the attention of the Academy and of Ficino especially. Leonardo was well acquainted with these notions having been with Ficino in his Academy. Moreover he had lived for a while with Pacioli and had a deep understanding of perspective and proportion.

He achieves the natural appearance of the divine forms that he is representing (the infant Jesus and Mary) by mathematical and geometric structures as is manifest from his study for the painting itself that retains myriad drawn lines of perspective which are clearly visible.

**MUSIC AND THE RENAISSANCE**

The fundamental implicit but powerful notion that governed so much of Renaissance thought and ideals was the compatibility of opposites - a third point resolving apparent conflict. Thus Pico sought to advance the commonality of philosophic and religious teaching of the Kabbala, Platonic principles and Christianity. Similarly, as discussed above, Ficino's ideal embraces the principle of a unity in all forms of art and philosophy.

The classical domain of reason and dialectic is established again. Seeming conflict of the thesis and the antithesis is merged in the synthesis. Thus the divine is the ultimate synthesis of which Pico speaks so beautifully in the first few pages of his Oration.

I mention this here since it is this principle that governs the development of music in the Renaissance. This is not a subject that has engaged the attention of scholars as extensively as other art forms since it does not reveal the coruscating effect of elaborate polyphony and counterpoint of the late 17$^{th}$ century coupled with the dominion of melody.

However music in the 15$^{th}$ and 16$^{th}$ century Renaissance illuminates how a mediaeval mode of music evolved in a way that retained the unity of musical expression but also created variety out of that unity through contrast or conflict by use of polyphonic musical ideas.

I have alluded to the essential nature of music that is the intervals of the sounds or as Mozart expresses it "*The music is not in the notes, but in the silence between*". He perceives an abiding constant - that the truth of anything is what underlines its relation to other things. Such is the conclusion of those who understand quantum physics. It is the interval that engenders harmony, melody, and counterpoint.

The notion of the seeming duality of unity and variety is the basis of the musical form known as the Cantus Firmus. It is necessary to understand the musical form that this term conveys. There are also the later extrapolations of it - the Canon, Chaconne and Passacaglia that flourished in the 16$^{th}$ to mid-18$^{th}$ centuries which deserve attention.

Music of the mediaeval period was largely religious. A constant feature of its sacred music was the Cantus Firmus. Originally in the form of a Gregorian chant it became typically to be sung by the tenor voice. As the derivation of 'tenor' implies the Cantus Firmus chant was the ground of the work held with long phrases with elaboration in the upper voices.

The cyclic mass was widely adopted as the accepted form of sung mass by the mid-15$^{th}$ century. This was a setting of the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei bound

together by a common musical ground comprising the Cantus Firmus thus imparting unity to the whole. The cyclic mass is in essence a series of movements sustained and informed by a singular musical theme. It flourished during the Renaissance of the 15th and 16th centuries.

The impact of the Renaissance on this form of musical expression was to remove it from the cultural dominion of the Church and to create elaborate forms of polyphonic upper parts often with secular humanist subjects. The advent of printing allowed wide dissemination of such musical forms. It ceased to be solely plainchant and was extended to other musical ideas both religious and secular.

Whilst the strict use of the Cantus Firmus declined in the 16th century the notion of a constant ground for the uprising of musical variety in the parts of the voices and instruments survived to emerge in other forms in the 17th century. These were the Passacaglia, Chaconne and Canon. Each of these is informed by the principle of singularity revealed in variety. Each is a form of variation or repetition grounded on a governing motif or theme. The Passacaglia has a bass motif, the Chaconne is a harmonic theme and the Canon has polyphonic repetition of a single melody with 3 or more voices or parts.

The moving piece by Pachelbel *Alle Menschen Mussen Sterben* (All men are mortal) included in his *Musicalische Sterbens-Gedancken* (Musical Thoughts on Dying) of 1683 following the death of his wife and only son is an example of the power and intensity of Cantus Firmus. As well as the Chorales of J S Bach one of the most sublime of these forms of his, or any music, is his celebrated Chaconne for unaccompanied violin.

As with philosophy and the visual arts so with music. The Renaissance did not spurn the mediaeval as Lings suggests. Indeed it revealed a deep and comprehensive adherence to the universal revealed in the temporal which it found in the philosophy of the ancients.

That the variety was so wonderful in no sense diminishes the implicit unity.

**SUMMARY**

The glory of the Renaissance is that in finding harmonies with ancient Greek and Hebrew philosophy it revealed in its works that what made the individual significant was his divinity. Such works were indeed *"an opening from the particular on to the universal*[31]*".*

If such were the dominant ideals of the Renaissance it is now necessary to address the central question of whether Shakespeare was a man of the Renaissance or, as Lings would have it, a lingering exponent of a mediaeval ideal.

[31] Lings p 2 para 2

**SHAKESPEARE AND THE RENAISSANCE**

There is no doubt that Shakespeare came into contact with the Renaissance formulations of the Perennial in some form since, as I seek to illustrate in the last section of this article, it shines through his lines. He may have come to a realisation of it for himself. What is beyond doubt is that the sun of the Renaissance shone brightly upon him.

Renaissance England in the late 16th century and early 17th century was itself an Exchange in which new philosophical and cultural notions were reflected in the literature and intellectual intercourse of that time. There is no longer any doubt that Shakespeare was well acquainted with streams of thought that flowed from the well spring of philosophy and culture that was the Renaissance.

*Montaigne*

It now accepted that Shakespeare read the works of Montaigne, the celebrated humanist of the French Renaissance, translated by John Florio at the turn of the 16th/17th centuries. The Tempest contains clear echoes – almost transcriptions - of Montaigne's essay 'Of the Caniballes' (p. 102) heard in Gonzalo's description of his perfect natural commonwealth (2.1. 148–65) there is '*no kind of traffic'*, '*no name of magistrate'*, no '*riches, poverty / And use of service'*.

There are many apparent earlier cross overs from Montaigne in the plays.

Montaigne's comment "*Those who have compared our life to a dream were right... We are sleeping awake, and waking asleep*"Book II, Ch. 12 is clearly reflected in A Midsummers Night's Dream in its exploration of illusion and reality.

Hamlet has many illustrations of the importance of Montaigne as a prompt for Shakespeare in some of the most telling lines of the play.

Hamlet's "*Ecstasy? My pulse as yours doth temperately keep time*," (III .iv.130–31), echoes Montaigne's "*during his ecstasy, he seemed to have neither pulse nor breath*" from "Of the Force of Imagination."

Polonius's *"This above all: to thine own self be true"*(Hamlet I.iii) reflects Montaigne's "*That above all, he be instructed to yield, yea to quit his weapons unto truth"* from "Of the Institution of Education of Children."

The essential lines of Hamlet in Act 2 as to the mind have close resemblance to Montaigne:-

The dicta of Montaigne "*Things are not bad in themselves, but our cowardice makes them so*" (Book I.14)is mirrored in "*Thus conscience* [fear of consequences as detailed in the beginning of soliloquy] *doth make cowards of us all"*(Hamlet II.i).

Montaigne's "*It is the mind that maketh good or ill, That maketh wretch or happy, rich or poor* (Book II.13) is reflected in the comments of Hamlet "*there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so*" (II.ii).

Each of these observations are fundamental to appreciating the significance of thinking in obscuring inner realisation of the way for Hamlet and thus for humanity – the cloud of unknowing. It is a formulation that can be found in ancient Perennial texts including the *Ashtavakra Gita* [32]*"Virtue and vice, pleasure and pain are modes of the mind, and thy Self is independent of them".*

It is true that the English translation of Montaigne was not finally published until 2 years after the completion of Hamlet. However it was available well before Hamlet was completed[33]

As has been said [34] "More broadly, there is something strikingly Montaigne-like in Hamlet's intertwining of Stoicism — "*Give me that man / That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him / In my heart's core"* — (III .ii.64–66) with philosophical skepticism — "*And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust?"* — (II .ii.297–98)".

*Giordano Bruno*

That Renaissance ideals informed his plays can also be seen in the extent to which Shakespeare was drawn to the works of Giordano Bruno – one of the great philosophers of the age and a mathematician and poet. He expounded a theory of the nature of the cosmos in which he argued the stars were distant suns with their own planets, that these planets might foster life of their own and that the universe is infinite with a plurality of worlds, without a centre.

Bruno's perception is astounding both as to the metaphysical and on the nature of the cosmos. His scope and insight is revealed in a few of his precepts and dicta of which the following are a slender selection[35]:-

- I understand Being in all and over all, as there is nothing without participation in Being, and there is no being without Essence. Thus nothing can be free of the Divine Presence.
- Nature is none other than God in things... Animals and plants are living effects of Nature; Whence all of God is in all things... Think thus, of the

[32] Ashtavakara Ch 1 verse 6

[33] Stephen Greenblatt's introduction **to** Shakespeare's Montaigne, a selection of Florio's translations of the Essays (New York Review Books Classics 2014

[34] Stephen Greenblatt's Op Cit.

[35] See Giordano Bruno's Cause Principle and Unity (1584) and The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast (1584)

sun in the crocus, in the narcissus, in the heliotrope, in the rooster, in the lion.

- Everything that consists in generation, decay, alteration and change is not an entity, but a condition and circumstance of entity and being[36].
- This whole which is visible in different ways in bodies, as far as formation, constitution, appearance, colors and other properties and common qualities, is none other than the diverse face of the same substance.
- Anything we take in the Universe, because it has in itself that which is All in All, includes in its own way, the entire soul of the world, which is entirely in any part of it.
- The Divine light is always in man, presenting itself to the senses and to the comprehension, but man rejects it.

His description of Nature as God in things recalls the Vedic notion of Lila (Sanskrit: लीला) being the divine play enacted as the manifest world. He was the first philosopher of modern times to assert that the indwelling soul owed a duty to its own essential nature and was not bound by any extraneous authority[37]. For him the '*kingdom of heaven is within you"*.

We know that Bruno came across the works of Ficino when being instructed by Teofilo da Vairano who in turn had been familiar with the Platonic ideas of Giles of Viterbo and Girolamo Seripando[38].

Bruno came to London and remained there for 2 years from 1584 to 1586. He was welcomed by Queen Elizabeth I and admitted to Court. He lectured at Oxford University on the immortality of the soul, reincarnation and Copernicus's heliocentric theory of the solar system. There he would have met John Case another humanist and a follower of Aristotle.

He moved in London society and its intellectual world[39]. When in London Bruno wrote his main works the "London Dialogues" based on the Platonic model including "*Cause Principle and Unity*" and "*On the Infinite Universe and Worlds*"(1584). Bruno dedicated two of them to his friend and "*kindred spirit*" Sir Philip Sidney whom he held to be the most important figure of the English renaissance. He wrote sonnets based on Petrarch.

The correlation between Bruno's works and the plays of Shakespeare has been the subject of recent scholarship[40].

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[36] Full literal translation is "*Of the eternal corporeal substance (which is not producible ex nihilo, nor reducible ad nihilum, but rarefiable, condensable, formable, arrangeable, and "fashionable") the composition is dissolved, the complexion is changed, the figure is modified, the being is altered, the fortune is varied, only the elements remaining what they are in substance, that same principle persevering which was always the one material principle, which is the true substance of things, eternal, ingenerable and incorruptible*"

[37] William Boulting, in *Giordano Bruno: His Life, Thought, and Martyrdom* (1916)

[38] Giordano Bruno by Ingrid D Rowland 2009 University of Chicago pp 38 - 52

[39] Ingrid D Rowland Philosopher/Heretic 2009 Chicago University pp 157,158

[40] Giordano Bruno by Derran Charlton OXFORDIAN Volume XIV 2012

It appears that when speaking of "*matter*" (Hamlet II.ii.193-5) Hamlet is reading from Bruno's play, *Il Candelaio* (1582). There are other close similarities including the following lines of Bruno:-

> *Everything which is, either here or there, either near or far, either now or to come, is either early or late (*dedication to *Il Candelaio)*:

and those of Hamlet

> *If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come.* (V.2 192-198)

Bruno's notion of the indwelling singularity is echoed in Julius Caesar and Troilus and Cressida as well as Measure for Measure as is illustrated in the last section of this article. His lines from *Il Candelaio* (1582) re-emerge in Hamlet and form the ultimate resolution of the tragedy.

*Castiglione*

There is an account in Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (1528) of the Platonic/Plotinus notion of the ascent to Love and Beauty and the merging of the soul with the absolute divine.

The book was one of a number of Renaissance treatises on the ideals of a true gentleman. It had considerable impact on the English cultural world. It was translated by Sir Thomas Hoby in 1561 and is now recognised as a source for Shakespeare. It has also been called[41], "*The most important single contribution to a diffusion of Italian values*" throughout Europe.

Castiglione describes how perception of the particular beauty of a particular woman yields to his beholding a universal beauty – *'he shall make a universal conceit and bring the multitude of [particular beauties] to the unitie of one alone'* that "*decketh out all bodies*". He describes how *"instead of going out of his wits with thought"* his soul turns to the "*beholding of her owne substance*" and the fulfilment of the sovereign purpose of creation the unveiling of reality beyond the "*discourse of reason*" and ultimate union with God.

It has been argued[42] that Shakespeare's plays contain many reflections of the unfolding of self-knowledge. The notion of ascent of the soul by revelation of beauty at successive levels described by Castiglione would have been familiar to him. It has been convincingly submitted[43] that such is the account in As You Like It of Orlando's realisation in Rosalind of the 'Platonic' stages of beauty. He passes through these stages until he declares to Rosalind that he *"can live no more by thinking"* and finally when Rosalind removes her disguise (as Ganymede) she is revealed to him as the divine nature of beauty. "*Hymen from heaven brought her*" to revealing beauty "*by heavenly synod devised*". Illusion of beauty disguised as the particular is displaced by realising the divine.

[41] Denys Hay quoted by Osborne, *Urbino: the Story of a Renaissance City*, p. 168.
[42] Shakespeare and Platonic Beauty Ch 6 by John Vyvyan Chatto and Windus
[43] John Vyvyan Op Cit

*Dr John Dee*

Before leaving the age and times of Shakespeare mention should be made of Dr John Dee, a Renaissance polymath, with interests in ancient history, astronomy, cryptography and mathematics and Hermetic philosophy. He was a student of the Renaissance Neo-Platonism of Marsilio Ficino and a tutor to Phillip Sidney. He was a compulsive collector of books. It is believed that in his library there were 3000 books and 1,000 manuscripts. His library was larger than either of those of Oxford or Cambridge Universities.

It is commonly argued that Dee was in some way the inspiration for Prospero in The Tempest. Both were devoted to books and to the exhaustive study of them. It is to this that Prospero alludes when relating his exile he refers to Gonzalo in the lines

*Knowing I lov'd my books, he furnish'd me*
*From mine own library with volumes that*
*I prize above my dukedom.(I.ii)*

Is Shakespeare's acquaintance with these evocations of Renaissance notions of the Perennial, as briefly summarised above, revealed in his works? This article concludes with that enquiry.

**SHAKESPEARE AND THE PERENNIAL**

Since as I hope I have to some extent shown how Renaissance ideals reflect the fundamental aspects of the Perennial it would perhaps be surprising if they did not also emerge in Shakespeare's texts.

There is always the temptation to read into a text a "perennial" construction of its meaning and this is particularly the case with Shakespeare's plays and sonnets. The notion of the self and self-knowledge in Shakespeare has been discussed in various treatises[44]. It is necessary to beware of wishful thinking and being drawn into finding in his every word a philosophic significance that it does not possess.

*The notion of death*

The apprehension of death forms the central fulcrum of Hamlet which is considered at greater length in this article. Moreover notions of illusion and reality inform so much of Shakespeare's work. Accordingly some propositions which rest on the Perennial as to death and as to illusion and reality are offered tentatively below.

Our origins as a species were a great trouble to the Victorians. Until Darwin it was assumed that mankind was unique and with divine right over the manifest creation.

[44] See Shakespeare's Patterns of Self-knowledge by Prof Rolf Soellner Ohio State University Press 1972

Now it is the general belief prevailing in contemporary Western culture that as particular human beings we are unique – the cult of the 'individual'.

Birth opens up a process whereby a creature emerges in corporal form with the miraculous facilities of comprehending and adapting to its environment and self reproduction.

Humans are, with all other organic life, essentially creative. All that they 'do' is a form of creativity. They have this in common with all other life forms.

The process of adapting to environment, of managing relations with each other and other creatures, and forming of hierarchies (termites, bees, apes etc) has given rise in humans (and it seems other fauna) gave rise to the facility of thought from which springs language and its corollary speech. They are not alone in this – other species have such facilities to a less prominent and complex extent.

The power of thought and speech with its attendant 'emotions' has been applied by humanity to give rise to forms of great beauty and wisdom.

It has also enabled it to create concepts. These include the concept of a particular 'person' whom they believe they are, distinct from other persons who also believe themselves to be a particular person. That is why when 2 people talk to each other there are 4 of them present.

This belief in a 'person' is in reality an identity formed out of a compound of thoughts and emotions which are taken to be the essential individual - with a body and a name as well. There is nothing essentially enduring or real about it.

What is the real?

Is it not the knowing, as part of one's being, that we are not separate and that we are one with each other and all of life? That is why we love dogs and all animals, flowers, trees, the sky, the sea, the running rivers. That is why we are drawn to beauty. That accounts for selflessness – the essence of love.

Thus what is it that dies on death?

Surely it is only that which was started by birth? Is it not a return from form to the formless?

Can it be anything else. The passing away of a conceived identity. It is sad for those who continue but that is because they remember the qualities that revealed the reality – through love, loyalty, courage and steadfastness which are all talismans of the self less and the enduring.

After writing this section I discovered the sayings of Giordano Bruno amongst which is the following beautifully expressing this:-

> *"Everything that consists in generation, decay, alteration and change is not an entity, but a condition and circumstance of entity and being.*

*Journey from the Fall. Realisation*

Lings assumes that Shakespeare is the keeper of the gate to sanctification "*in other words his regaining what was lost at the Fall*" – "*the passing through Purgatory in this life*".

Lings refers only to perceived transcendent reality but does not mention the immanent. He appears in his article to be concerned only with the Brahma not with Atman - the Father and not the Son. He does not in his article refer to the notion of realisation of the universal within the individual.

His thesis is that Shakespeare embraced the prevailing tenet of the Middle Ages that man has to make a journey to through purgatory to salvation or sanctification. Mortality is as he puts it the "Sin of Adam". He characterises Shakespeare as a relentlessly exacting guardian of the gate to sanctification which may be reached and passed through to reach purification only by purgatorial pilgrims. Thus may be regained "*what was lost in the Fall*". This was indeed the prevailing tenet of the mediaeval period of which, Lings asserts, Shakespeare was a last echo.

It is accordingly necessary to examine the notion of Sin and its corollary redemption.

Lings refers to Shakespeare as depicting the journey of regaining what was lost in the Fall. But this reveals a critical misperception of sin and redemption.

The word 'sin' is indelibly printed in our minds as connoting moral wrongdoing which offends against law or accepted custom of behaviour. It is pejorative - a judgment indicating both guilt and punishment.

But its root meaning in Greek *ha·mar·ti'a* and Hebrew *hata* is "to miss the way" or "miss the mark" or its corollary "to err". St Paul in his epistle to the Romans uses *hamartia* to refer to sin. In Hebrew the root word carries the meaning to"miss" or "go astray".

It is easy to see how the connotation of "missing" evolves into "err" and to apply that to failure to observe moral rules or laws such as the 613 commandments or *mitzvot* in the Hebrew Torah. St Paul in his epistle to the Romans (Ch 5 12 – 21) uses *hamartia* to refer to sin as being the breaking of a law or a command.

But the essential meaning of the word is wholly obscured by such an extrapolation. Confining it to violations of moral rules or ethical principles imposed under an overarching code of supposed divine or scriptural authority deprives it of its proper meaning. It becomes "*this foul stinking lump of sin*"[45]

For a proper understanding of sin it is necessary to enquire what may be the 'mark' or the 'way'. What does Jesus mean when he says "*I am the Way*" (John 14)? What is "*I am*"? . What is meant by "*I AM WHO I AM*" (Exodus 3:14) or "*Be still and know that I am*" (Psalms 46:10). What does Jesus mean by "*Behold the Kingdom of Heaven is within you*"? What is the 'Way' of Lao Tsu? What does Heraclitus mean by his Logos?

What is indicated by these statements is that salvation lies in being – in the 'I am'; that a state of consciousness, eternal and unchanging may be known now. That it is also,

[45] Cloud of Unknowing 14th century anonymous

inexpressibly, the transcendent reality informing the entire universe. That for its realisation it is necessary to be wholly still, free from the dominion of belief in our separate existence as a person with all the attendant thoughts, agitation, concepts and related emotions that form almost all our experience of existence.

Hence the statement of Heraclitus "*.. though the Word (Logos) is common to all, yet most men live as if each had a private wisdom of his own"*. Or of Shakespeare himself in Measure for Measure "*… man, proud man, Drest in a little brief authority, Most ignorant of what he's most assured".* Such is also the Ahaṃkāra (अहंकार) – the Sanskrit description of personal or egoic identification or attachment depriving one of the awareness of consciousness of being. The term derives from 'Ahaṃ' being the the "I" and kāra is "any created thing" or "to do".

The Perennial in all its forms explains that this identification of the one "I", with thought, emotions, feelings and the various conditions of our temporal existence is the cause of all suffering. As the Buddha puts it "*The cause of pain is the craving for individual life. Deliverance from craving does away with pain.*" Such deliverance comes with deep acceptance of what is. It is a form of surrender or of giving up. It is not resignation but a cessation of the binding of our identity with thought. Properly considered all identification rests upon thought and the feelings it engenders – the conditioning of the mind to interpret everything through the prism of a private separate persona.

Sin describes the condition of Man the human when he has lost his sense of timeless consciousness in the hypnotic pull of experience and phenomena which, though he does not realise it, has obscured his sense of Being and reduced him to enduring insecurity. As Plotinus puts it one "*becomes evil through stooping towards and mingling and confusing the soul with body and matter"*[46]*.*

Socrates asserted that "he knows nothing". He also held to the view that what makes humans sin is lack of knowledge. Knowledge as a state of being paradoxically requires absence of thought – what the Buddha describes as *sunyata* (emptiness or nothingness). To know is to realise. The knowing or realisation is the Good. It is, as described already, knowledge as a state of being.

Lings maintains that Shakespeare was following a spiritual path. This appears likely given the quality of his work and the frequent and beautiful illuminations of the Perennial in his works. But he surely is not the "*porter to the Gate of Paradise*" who will let nothing pass but perfection. Nor does he demonstrate in his plays a "*quest for human perfection*". Nor is he "*relentlessly exacting*".

Lings refers to Shakespeare's heroes as being "*purgatorial pilgrim*" making the 'exacting' journey to salvation or sanctification. The path of "becoming".

But the Perennial holds that there is no journey, no struggle or grasping or achieving or end point of '*sanctification*'. There is no "*history of humankind*".[47] What there is realisation. The

[46] Shakespeare and Platonic Beauty John Vyvyan Chatto & Windus Ch 2

[47] Martin Lings p 3 para 2

light of the Sun in the allegory of the cave in Plato's Republic is universal and dissipates illusion and error. When what obscures consciousness, the pure sense of Being, falls away - whether it is torn away by suffering or dissolved with practice of stillness, clear attention and presence – or by both - the realisation is instant. It gives rise to an experience of spaciousness and silent acceptance. It is a surrender. The release from thought and the person. There is no journey to a distant perfection to be attained in the future.

The Perennial holds that awareness of consciousness is revealed in complete inner stillness, with no thought, in the immeasurable present moment.

By diminishing the dominion of thought and admitting silence to the mind and stillness to one's sense of being these precepts dissolves into knowing. This is only possible in the here and now there being no other moment.

*The indwelling being – the "I"*

Repeatedly in his plays Shakespeare deals with theatre of existence in which men and women are players. He describes the condition of man as one of acting, artifice and delusion and shows that our identities are as vapour.

> *To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,*
> *Creeps in this petty pace from day to day*
> *To the last syllable of recorded time,*
> *And all our yesterdays have lighted fools*
> *The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!*
> *Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player*
> *That struts and frets his hour upon the stage*
> *And then is heard no more: it is a tale*
> *Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,*
> *Signifying nothing.* (Macbeth V.iv)

Such is the futility of identity with illusion when our 'self' is a conceived construct.

Shakespeare's plays contain many references to knowing thyself in various textual garbs. But these words cannot in themselves be taken to indicate any deeper self within, having unity and communion with a transcendent reality or being. Often they indicate an exhortation to moral conduct or control of passion or unseemly conduct – see for example Rosalind's chiding of Phoebe in As You Like It (III.v.57) "*but mistress know thyself*" - or revulsion at past crimes as in Richard II and Macbeth. Sir Philip Sydney, a leading and respected Elizabethan poet soldier and scholar, held that the highest end of knowledge of a man's self was well-doing and that the poet being the surest guide to that goal.

Yet there are references in Shakespeare nonetheless that acknowledge an inner and deep constancy, beyond time and place, and indicate something beyond morality and good conduct relative to convention and codes. Amongst the plays that indicate a reference to the inner self or Atman or singular 'I' are I suggest Julius Caesar, Hamlet, Measure for Measure

and The Tempest. It is not claimed that Shakespeare was acquainted with Vedic teachings or texts. But there is little doubt that the perennial truths they embody were also enshrined in philosophic notions that he would certainly have encountered.

The Advaita Vedanta – at the root of the Perennial - holds that there are 4 key Upanishadic statements which indicate the ultimate unity of the individual (Atman) with Supreme (Brahman). One of these is Aham̐ Brahmāsmi **( अहम् ब्रह्मास्मि)** "I am that Brahma". [

Expressed as the Way or the Logos or the Tao it is the realisation of the union of consciousness in the temporary form with the inexpressible transcendent consciousness of the formless. With Heraclitus we can see that all things are in flux and illusory being always relative – the Maya of the Veda. Yet the miracle is that Being or pure consciousness can be known and known as Being itself.

The notion of the singular 'I' or in-dwelling self emerges in certain of the plays in the guise of the "eye" which, in speech and also by analogy, is identical to the one or "I", the universal singularity informing the one without a second but which is revealed by reflection in all forms.

Such is the statement of Brutus in Julius Caesar "*The eye sees not itself but by reflection, by some other things*". Shakespeare's contemporary John Case, an Oxford philosopher and his exact contemporary, echoes this perception in his *Speculum Moralium Quaestionum* (1585) and *Reflexus Speculi Moralis* (1596) by his assertion, drawn upon Platonic ideas, that the eye of 'the other' reveals the self.

This analogy is more fully developed in Troilus and Cressida in the dialogue of Ulysses and Achilles Troilus and Cressida (III.iii line 95):-

ULYSSES

*A strange fellow here*
*Writes me: 'That man, how dearly ever parted,*
*How much in having, or without or in,*
*Cannot make boast to have that which he hath,*
*Nor feels not what he owes, but by reflection;*
*As when his virtues shining upon others*
*Heat them and they retort that heat again*
*To the first giver.'*

ACHILLES

*This is not strange, Ulysses.*
*The beauty that is borne here in the face*
*The bearer knows not, but commends itself*
*To others' eyes; nor doth the eye itself,*
*That most pure spirit of sense, behold itself,*

*Not going from itself; but eye to eye opposed*
*Salutes each other with each other's form;*
*For speculation turns not to itself,*
*Till it hath travell'd and is mirror'd there*
*Where it may see itself. This is not strange at all.*

A remarkable and profound description of the indwelling soul, or the "I", when obscured by the pride and conceit of the ego or Ahaṃkāra (अहंकार) appears in Isabella's lines:-

> *but man, proud man,*
> *Drest in a little brief authority,*
> *Most ignorant of what he's most assured,*
> *His glassy essence, like an angry ape,*
> *Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven*
> *As make the angels weep; who, with our spleens,*
> *Would all themselves laugh mortal.* Measure for Measure Isabella 2.2

Shakespeare here describes both the revelation, by reflection, of the personal self and also what man himself truly is. Shakespeare describes proud Man as being ignorant of his 'glassy essence' and couples this ignorance with a striking depiction of presumption and pride in his imagined identity and illusion of supposed authority. His abiding assurance namely his 'glassy essence', is a beautiful and succinct depiction of the mirror of the universal in the indwelling soul or "I".

The mirror is found in an analogous description in the earliest known scriptures expounding the Perennial. In the *Ashtavakra Gita* (Sanskrit अष्टावक्रगीता) the sage Ashtavahara asserts "*Within and without the form reflected in the mirror, exists the mirror. Llkewise the Supreme Lord exists within and without the body"*[48] The mirror is the symbol of the indwelling essence or the Vedic Self unaffected by the body and mind or its creations.

Isabella and Macbeth[49] each refer to the arrogance and absurdity of Man when his sense of himself it bound to objects of sense and mind. His authority is not in his essential nature but in his attachments to ego enhancing possessions and symbols of status.

But Shakespeare in Isabella's speech goes further - he asserts the reality of Man's being that is never changing and is what Man truly is and of what he is most assured.

*Illusion and Reality*

[48] Ashtavakara Gita Trans Hari Prasa Shastri Shanti Sadan1961Ch 1 verse 19
[49] Macbeth V.iv

The nature of illusion and reality, of wakefulness and sleep or unconsciousness is depicted by Shakespeare in his works most notably As You Like It, A Midsummers Night Dream and The Tempest.

The fantastic and the illusory are beautifully weaved with reality into the fabric of A Midsummers Night Dream. It deals in hallucinations and the delusion of appearances. It treats with dreaming and wakefulness: illusion and reality: what is imagined and what Prof McGinn describes as veridically perceived[50] (he uses "veridical" in the sense of 'coinciding with reality').

There is a wonderful allusion in Theseus lines (A Midsummers Night Dream V.i) to the abstract, inexpressible and universal but nevertheless apprehended in form by our senses,

> *The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling*
> *Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,*
> *And as imagination bodies forth*
> *The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen*
> *Turns them into shapes, and gives to airy nothings*
> *A local habitation and a name.*

It i**s** the enchanted Forest of Arden of As You Like It that gives rise to the famous declaration of Jacques that **"***All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players*."(II.vii) echoing Erasmus in his "In Praise of Folly" (1511) "*For what is life but a play in which everyone acts a part".*

But this very illusion conceals a reality. As Antonio says in The Merchant of Venice**,** "*I hold the world but as the world… A stage where every man must play a part*. This is more than an observation as to the roles that our condition as humans imposes. It carries with it a fundamental implication of man the actor in himself. Prof A.D. Nuttall describes this[51] **as "***an incipient Platonism is at work within the dramaturgical art."*

The Perennial notion of the illusory nature of the forms of existence, in relation to a reality that they both disguise and reveal, is one which is distilled in The Tempest. As Prospero puts it **"***We are such stuff / As dreams are made on; and our little life is rounded with a sleep."* It rests on illusion, magic and fantasy with the constant reality being the part of Prospero himself - "*I am Prospero*".

Magic is given prominence in Renaissance texts as it serves to fill the void of the inexplicable. Thus Prospero, who creates the "*airy nothings*"[52] that populate his island, exercises magical power to make creatures which are illusions. Science has since diminished the realm of magic but perhaps will not extinguish the use of the term to denote what the mind cannot perceive or grasp.

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[50] Shakespeare's Philosophy by Prof Colin McGinn 2009 Harper Collins
[51] Shakespeare theThinker Yale University Press 2008
[52] A Midsummer's Night's Dream V.i.

There is an immediate correlation between the fable of The Tempest and the *advaita vedanta* scripture the *Ashtavakra Gita* (Sanskrit अष्टावक्रगीता)[53], a dialogue between Ashtavakra and Janaka on the nature of spirit, reality and bondage. It propounds that the world is but a magic show lasting 3 or 4 days[54]. Names and forms are unreal and belief or identity with them is ignorance creating bondage. It asserts the utter unreality of the manifest world and the absolute oneness informing all. It holds that names and forms as unreal arising from ignorance – the failure to perceive essential reality.

As Ashtavakra says *"Thou art that Consciousness, the supreme Bliss, in which the world appears as an imagined object like a snake in a rope. Be happy! That thou art!"*[55]. Many of his statements are closely reflected in Bruno's texts- not that would have read or had any information about them.

It is as if the very well spring of the Perennial bursts through the crust of existence of later ages without bidding.

*Thought: Acceptance:*

The notion of acceptance, or surrender to what is, – that is to say witnessing without thought, personal bias or mental cast – informs the Perennial in all its versions It addresses the *suka* and *duka*: the pleasures and pains that make up our experience of existence and which arise from desire or its corollary aversion. The Perennial advises that such arise from ingrained habit of the ego or *Ahamkara* or 'ME' of forming a judgment or an opinion about how it thinks of an event or other phenomenon – taking a mental position about it often virtually simultaneously with becoming aware of it.

It is the mind that evokes emotional reactions of all kinds including thrill, excitement, loss, fear, anger, revenge, jealousy or just distaste. So completely does this process cover up our conscious being and so swiftly does this happen that we take the event or phenomenon to be the cause of such emotional reaction to what the thinking mind has conveyed. The thought becomes us in the sense that our identity is transfixed by it.

Silence of the mind and its concomitant stillness of being are essential conditions for awareness. It is often commented on by exponents of the Perennial. It is the dictum in Exodus to Be Still. As Ashtavakara[56] declares "*He who has acquired the natural state of vacuity of the mind may act as he pleases".* He is free from desire and aversion and unattached to thought forms.

Silence and thinking are treated by Shakespeare in profound and beautiful terms.

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[53] Ashtavakara Gita Trans Hari Prasa Shastri Shanti Sadan1961 Ch X verse 2
[54] Ashtavakara Ch X verse 2
[55] Ashtavakara Ch 1 verse10
[56] Ahstavakara Ch XVIII verse 24

As Shakespeare's Claudio declares "*Silence is the perfectest herault of joy. I were but little happy if I could say how much*[57].

In the final part of The Tempest (IV.i 39 – 42) Prospero instructs Ariel that he Prospero must

> *"Bestow upon the eyes of this young couple*
> *Some vanity of mine art: it is my promise,*
> *And they expect it from me."*

However before he procures the appearance of Iris, Ceres and Juno with their abundant gifts of nature honour, riches, marriage-blessing[58] he utters these lines to Ferdinand and Miranda

> *"Now come, my Ariel! Bring a corollary,*
> *Rather than want a spirit: appear and pertly!*
> *No tongue! all eyes! be silent."*

It is as if Prospero, alone in this world of transient existence and illusion, is the perceiver of reality and singular source of abundance the condition of which is silence. Later in this scene he again instructs "*Sweet now, silence…..Hush and be mute or else our spell is marred"*

How does Shakespeare treat with the phenomenon of thought? What do we find in his lines that indicates the notion of acceptance?

The phenomenon of thinking is addressed beautifully in the *Ashtavakra Gita* [59] "*Virtue and vice, pleasure and pain are modes of the mind, and thy Self is independent of them. Thou art neither the doer nor the enjoyer; ever free thou art"*

As mentioned above in the context of Montaigne there is a telling line in Hamlet Act 2 Scene 2. Hamlet makes the assertion that "*there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so*"

What is being said it that phenomena are neutral. We put our mixed grill on the table but dog wolfs them when we go to fetch the ketchup. Late for the train we find the car has a flat battery. Your wife leaves for another man. We are diagnosed with inoperable cancer. To these the Zen master asks "*Is that so*?" Krishnamurti once said to those who had all come to hear his wisdom "*do you know what is my secret?*". In the instant and wrapt silent attention that the comment invoked he said "*I do not mind what happens*".

In his earlier soliloquy Hamlet refers to the "*pale cast of thought"* which describes the deterioration of resolution by thought. This thought centres on Hamlet's '*me and my'* fears and forebodings about the imagined afterlife all of which are '*casts*' over the original clear perception and knowing. A projection of his identity into the unknown future.

[57] Much Ado About Nothing II.i
[58] See The Tempest IV.i lines 110 - 118
[59] Ashtavakara Ch 1 verse 6

So it is that we find in Hotspur's last lines[60] as he lies wounded on the field "*But thought's the slave of life"*

What is it that accounts for the unhappiness or misery that an event can seemingly inflict? Is it not Shakespeare's *'cast of thought'* about how this is for 'me' – why should this happen to me? – I cannot bear this! and so on? The misery is caused not by the phenomenon but by the person being wholly identified, impaled as it were, by the feelings that the personal interpretation of thought gives rise to. 'Me' governs it all. The sense of being or of the constant 'I' – the Aham or indwelling Self – vanishes.

Such thought is never about the present. It is always a projection of 'me' into the future (fear, want, lack, etc) as with Hamlet or the past (regret, victimhood, anger, guilt) as with Richard II and Macbeth. Accordingly, Nisargadatta Maharaj[61] requires "*a radical refusal to harbour thoughts*".

Thus the practice of staying out of past and future and in the ever present is of indispensable value.

*Providence and the Present*

Presence is essentially acceptance of what is. The 'person' vanishes and what emerges is the everlasting 'I' or limitless awareness. Consciousness has been withdrawn from mind-created self and rests unconditionally and completely in presence. That, of itself, evaporates the sense of me and with it all the drama, fear, self pity. doubt, discontent, want and other creatures of thought and condition.

The acceptance of the present as it is at this moment of itself extinguishes self. It is described in the Bhuddist teaching as *sunyata* (emptiness or nothingness) and *anatta* (*anatman)* non-self, lack of self. Sometimes also in great emergencies this 'person' disappears altogether since the present is all that is known. These challenges are seen neutrally and also with clarity.

This explains the lovely passage from Meister Eckhart "*I maintain that all sorrow comes from love of those things of which loss deprives me".* Or the aphorism "*When the ego weeps for what it as lost the Spirit rejoices for what it has found"* and the injunction *"Find death before death finds you".*[62]

It is like the Monkey who puts his hand in the sweet jar – however he could not extract it and the sweet. Ultimately he has to release the sweet.

Thus in the Perennial it is by acceptance of what is that the '*kingdom of heaven'* can be known. It is this acceptance of what is that is the clue to the meaning of 'Providence'. It is only to be found in the present. It cannot be found with thought.

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[60] Henry IV Pt 1 V.iii

[61] Author of *I Am That*, 1973 English translation of talks in Marathi by Maurice Frydman

[62] See also Falstaff Henry IV Pt 1 V.iii lines116-119 *"…to counterfeit dying **when a man thereby liveth**, is to be **no counterfeit** but the true and perfect image of life indeed"*

Meister Eckhart writing at the turn of the 13th/14th centuries AD is adamant as to the dangers of time past and time future.

> "*All creatures are go-betweens, and we are placed in time that by diligence in spiritual business we may grow liker and nearer to God. The aim of man is beyond the temporal in the serene region of the everlasting Present.*

And again

> *"Time is what keeps the light from reaching us. There is no greater obstacle to God than time."*

Boethius echoes these sayings in the 6th century AD, is like a spring that ceaselessly bursts through the crust of time. Consider his comment "*Nunc fluens facit tempus,nunc stans facit aeternitatum"* - The now that passes produces time, the now that remains produces eternity.

This was a notion that Huxley himself dwells on in his "Time Must Have A Stop**"** (1944 Chatto and Windus) in which Huxley ventilates philosophical ideas that were fully developed in his The Perennial Philosophy (1945). The title is drawn directly from Hotspur's speech in Henry IV Pt 1 V.iii

> "*But thoughts, the slaves of life and life, time's fool*
> *And time that takes a survey of the world*
> *Must have a stop.*"

Huxley[63] has this profound commentary on Hotspur's speech:-

> "But Hotspur's summary has a final clause: time must have a stop. And not only must, as a prophecy or an ethical imperative, but also does have a stop, in the present indicative tense and as a matter of brute empirical experience, here and now, for all who so desire. It is only by taking the fact of eternity into account that we can deliver thought from its slavery to life. And it is only by deliberately paying our attention and our primary allegiance to eternity that we can prevent time from turning our lives into a pointless or diabolic foolery. Brahman, the Ground, the Clear Light of the Void, the Kingdom of God are all one timeless reality. Seek it first, and all the rest- from an adequate philosophy to a release from the compulsion to stultify and destroy ourselves will be added.

Consider then the following lines uttered by Ulysees[64] – again to Achilles:-

> *Time hath my lord a wallet at his back*
> *Wherein he puts alms for oblivion*
> *A great-sized monster of ingratitudes*

[63] "A sentence from Shakespeare" in Time Must Have a Stop;
[64] Troilus and Cressida Act 3 Scene 3 lines144 - 155

*Those scraps are good deeds past; which are devour'd*
*As fast as they are made, forgot as soon*
*As done.*
*Keep honour bright… Take the instant way*
*For honour travels in a strait so narrow where one but goes abreast.*

Troilus and Cressida was written (1602) shortly after Hamlet (1601). Shakespeare's deals in these plays with the perils of time and of thought each of which depend on past and future.

Shakespeare dwells on the human error of resistance to what is and the state of acceptance that cures it. Hamlet at the end of the tragedy reveals to Horatio his deep acceptance of or surrender to the present.

*Not a whit, we defy augury: there's a special*
*providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now,*
*'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be*
*now; if it be not now, yet it will come:*
*The readiness is all. Since no man knows*
*aught of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes? Let be (V.ii)*

The entire thrust of the tragedy of Hamlet is the conflict or interplay between fear and duty. This can be seen also as the interplay of thinking and acceptance or of time (past or future) and the present or timelessness.

As has been mentioned, Hamlet's soliloquy in Act 2 Scene 1 illuminates the paralysing effect of thinking on resolution. The thinking is *'conscience'* – it is the *'pale cast of thought*'. It arises with notions of the future and the unknown. This always gives rise to anxiety and doubt since it is the unknown and cannot be known. Fear of loss of life is fear of what will happen to this person, the loss of our identity. Thus in Hotspur's lines "*thoughts, the slaves of life and life, time's fool"*

However the lines uttered by Hamlet to Horatio at the final consummation of the tragedy reveal that Hamlet has reached a state of inner acceptance and surrender to what is. Such is only possible through the experience of presence which itself is acceptance. With that acceptance comes an inexpressible calm.

This state is not the destination of a journey. It is not arrived at by gaining knowledge but by loss of self. It is as if one had dropped something that was believed to be very heavy but only when released is it seen as insubstantial and unreal. This is the essence of the *perenni philosophia*.

Such then I suggest is the true import of Shakespeare's reflections on existence. They are for all time but are made of their time. That was the time of the Renaissance the literature of which he raised to its apex by his unsurpassed genius.

**SHAKESPEARE AND THE TIMELESS**

It appears to be the case that sublime creations of genius reveal nothing of the person who created them. Their works have no taint of self. They impose no matrix of belief or vision of reality. It is possible to derive from their compositions indications of the outlook or nature or character of the personas of Haydn, Beethoven and Bach. But it is not so with Mozart or with Leonardo or Rembrandt. Nor is it so with Shakespeare. His works are not impressed with an image of himself.

What their works engender in us is an ineffable wonder beyond the reach of appreciation and description. It is as if they depicted the transient with a perception of its essence. It is compassion without pity, beauty without age and love without an object. These are attributes of their creations. We know them in ourselves as if they were ourselves.

Shakespeare's plays are a magnificent commentary on the human condition. He holds a mirror up to the nature of human existence. That mirror is our true self as an image of the divine or universal. In describing the flux of the transient, the play of creation, the Maya of illusion which conceals reality, Shakespeare does so with sublime beauty and detachment. Whilst his works portray the Maya which conceals reality we are conscious also of the Lila the creative play of the divine absolute that informs the created world itself. There is no duality - all that exists is transient: what is is eternal.

JEREMY NIEBOER